

Like a Garment

By Shaykh Yasir Qadhi

هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَّهُنَّ

“...your wives are garments to you, and you are garments to them...”

—The Holy Qur'an, 2:187



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INTRODUCTION

As- Salaam Alaikum!

I welcome you to our 'Like A Garment' e-book, an initiative that seeks to educate Muslims to find conjugal bliss in their marriages.

The name of this project came from one of the most beautiful, poetic and profound metaphors of the Qur'aan. Allah states, "Permitted for you, during the night of the fast, that you approach your wives. They are your garments, and you are their garments" [al-Baqarah; 187].

In this verse, each spouse is described as a 'garment' to the other. The famous exegete Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 311) stated that this description most aptly described the act of intimacy between the spouses, for during that act, each spouse sheds his or her other garments and then wraps around the other, taking the place of clothes. Al-Qurtubi (d. 671) also comments on this metaphor, and adds that just as clothes protect their wearer from the external elements, similarly each spouse protects the other from external passions that would harm a marriage.

Combining between the various explanations of this beautiful metaphor found in the books of tafseer, we can derive many meanings from it:

- The act of procreation is so intimate that it is literally as if one of the spouses covers up the other, just as clothing covers up one's body. Another euphemism that the Qur'aan uses for the sexual act is the verb ghashsha, which means 'to cover up, to envelop'.
- One primary purpose of clothing is to conceal one's nakedness, since this nakedness (or `awrah) is embarrassing to display, and should be hidden from the eyes of others. Similarly, each spouse conceals the other spouse's faults, and does not reveal them to others.
- Clothing protects one from the external elements, such as heat and cold. Similarly, spouses protect one another from external desires that originate from many different sources. By satisfying these desires within the confines of marriage, external passions are removed.
- Clothing is the primary method through which humans beautify themselves. Without clothing, one is incomplete and naked. Similarly, spouses beautify and complete one another; when a person is not married, he or she is not yet complete and has not reached his or her full potential. Marriage is an essential part of being fully human, just like clothes are an essential part of being fully civilized.
- Clothes are only worn in front of others, and are not necessary in front of spouses. It is only in front of one's spouse that the other spouse can discard his or her garments.
- Clothes are the closest thing to one's body. Nothing comes between a person and his or her clothes. So the analogy of spouses being 'like clothes to one another' implies such a closeness – there is nothing, literally and metaphorically, that should come between spouses.





THE HADITH OF JABIR



THE HADITH OF JABIR: PART 1

Jabir b. Abdillah was the son of a famous warrior, Abdullah b. Haram. Jabir was from the Ansar, and accepted Islam as a young boy. He was blessed to participate in the Treaty of Aqaba, and lived an extremely long life. Because of this, Jabir became one of the most profuse narrators of hadith, earning his name in the top five companions in terms of quantity of hadith narrated.

Jabir married young – he was probably seventeen when he got married. His marriage occurred shortly after his father died a martyr in the Battle of Uhud. His story is mentioned in most books of hadith, including the two Sahih:

Jabir b. Abdillah reported that once he was on an expedition with the Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam*, and when they were close to the city of Madinah, he sped on his mount. The Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* asked him why he was in such a hurry to return home. Jabir replied, "I am recently married!" The Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* asked, "To an older lady or a younger one?" [the Arabic could also read: "To a widow or a virgin?"], to which he replied, "A widow." The Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* said, "But why didn't you marry a younger girl, so that you could play with her, and she could play with you, and you could make her laugh, and she could make you laugh?" He said, "O Messenger of Allah! My father died a martyr at Uhud, leaving behind daughters, so I did not wish to marry a young girl like them, but rather an older one who could take care of them and look after them." The Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* replied, "You have made the correct choice..."
[hadith to be continued in the following section]

This is part of a much larger hadith, known as the 'hadith of Jabir'. It is a hadith full of benefits, and in fact separate treatises have been written by our scholars just on this one hadith. Some of the benefits we can derive from the portion cited above include:

- The frankness of the Prophet's *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* question. He is encouraging Jabir to find a playful wife, and wants the both of them to enjoy each other. This clearly shows that it is one of the primary goals of a marriage that each party find satisfaction in the other.
- The connotation of being sexually playful is clearly implied, without any direct reference. From this, and many other references, we see that the Qur'aan and Sunnah are frank about sexuality, but never vulgar. This should be our attitude and tone as well.





THE HADITH OF JABIR: PART 2

In our previous section we mentioned the famous hadith of Jabir b. Abdilllah, in which the Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam asked Jabir if he had married a young girl,

“...so that you can play with her and she can play with you, and you could make her laugh, and she could make you laugh.”

The famous commentator of Sahih al-Bukhari, al-Hafidh Ibn Hajr, mentioned that this hadith also occurs with other wordings as well. In one authentic version, the hadith states, after Jabir mentioned that he had married an older lady,

“Why did you turn away from a young girl and her saliva?”

Benefits:

- Once again, we are struck with the frankness of the prophetic words. Clearly, the words ‘playfulness’ and ‘laughter’ indicate that what is being encouraged is the couple’s romance, foreplay, and generally ‘having fun’ with one other. It would do us well to contrast this straightforwardness of our Prophet with the ultra-reserved Muslim culture that we find around us, where ‘love’ and ‘romance’ are considered filthy words that should never be uttered in public!
- This understanding is further reinforced by examining the life of our Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam. In every sense of the term, he was a loving, caring, gentle, and compassionate husband to his wives. It is even correct and proper to say that he was romantic with his wives in the most ideal and noble of ways. Some of these hadiths will be mentioned in the later sections of this e-book.
- The variant wording that occurs (which mentions the saliva of a young girl) is explained by Ibn Hajr and al-Qurtubi as a reference to kissing the lips and licking the tongue. In other words, what is being referenced is passionate kissing – the perfect foreplay!
- The Islamic attitude towards sex is completely at odds with those of many Christian thinkers. St. Augustine (d. 430), who is perhaps the single most influential theologian of early Christianity, viewed sexual desire as something foul to be guilty and ashamed of. His writings had a profound impact on all future Christian notions of sex (and were also used to justify the prohibition of priests getting married). That is why, to this day, even many non-religious Christians are baffled by Islam’s attitude towards sex. It is mainly due to such notions that Islam has been viewed by many Westerners as being a ‘licentious’ religion. Such hadiths, like this one of Jabir, are mocked and ridiculed (one website comments, “How can a prophet of God command his followers to enjoy their wives?”). This shock stems from the basic Augustinian notion of sex being inherently evil. We must be aware of these psychological underpinnings when discussing Islam with others. For us as Muslims, sexual desire in and of itself is never associated with evil; it is only the misuse and abuse of such desire that is evil. Rather, sex is quite clearly implied in the Qur’aan as being a blessing from Allah, to be thoroughly enjoyed between spouses.





THE HADITH OF JABIR: PART 3

The final phrase of the hadith of Jabir that is relevant to us is:

Jabir said, "So when we were about to enter the city, the Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* said to me, 'Slow down, and enter at night, so that she who has not combed may comb her hair, and she who has not shaved may shave her private area.' Then he said to me, 'When you enter upon her, then be wise and gentle.'"

[Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim].

Benefits:

- The Prophet *sallallahu alayhi wa sallam* did not want Jabir to surprise his wife. At a time when there were no cell phones or other means of informing the family when a traveler would return, the Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* would send a crier into the city, announcing that the caravan was returning. Hence, he told Jabir to wait for this crier before proceeding into the city.
- We learn that spouses should physically beautify themselves for one another. Combing the hair is but one way to beautify; anything that increases the beauty and handsomeness of one spouse in front of the other is something to be encouraged. The Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* told the impatient Jabir that it was better for him to delay his arrival in order that his wife prepare herself for him.
- The explicit command to shave the pubes is an amazing phrase! We all know that a part of our Islamic tradition is that one must shave one's pubes; in this hadith, this command is put in the context of the sexual act. In other words, the husband is told to be patient so that his wife may beautify her private area in order to increase the aesthetic pleasure and gratification of sex. A husband and wife should make sure that even around their private areas, they look attractive to each other!
- Again and again, we see the frankness of the prophetic traditions, and the encouragement to enjoy intimacy in marriage. Contrast this to the ultra-conservative attitudes predominant in many Muslim cultures. It is as if some Muslims wish to be 'more strict' than the Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* himself!





THE HADITH OF JABIR: PART 4

The concluding part of the hadith of Jabir raises many other benefits, which we continue discussing below.

Benefits:

- The last phrase of the hadith is translated as '...then be wise and gentle'. The Arabic is 'fa-l-kayyis al-kayyis', which is an emphasis on this word. The word 'kayyis' primarily means wisdom, but it also has the connotation of gentleness. Scholars have understood this phrase to mean that Jabir should approach his wife in a gentle and wise manner.
- The fact that the Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam is instructing Jabir what to do at this time shows that he instructed his Ummah even about such personal matters. In one hadith, which deals with the etiquette of the restroom, the Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam said, "I am to you like a father, and I teach you like a father does..." [Reported by Abu Dawud]. Since Jabir did not have any older brothers, and since his father had passed away, the Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam took on this responsibility, and even advised him about sexual conduct. From this, we may extrapolate that people of knowledge should likewise not be shy when it comes to teaching Muslims conjugal etiquette when the need arises.
- Imam al-Bukhari, Ibn Khuzayma, and Ibn Hibban all narrated this wording, and they all understood the reference here to be an indirect reference to the act of intimacy. Once again, the wording is frank without being vulgar.
- What is meant by 'al-kayyis' is that Jabir should act in a wise manner; he has been gone for some time, and is newly married. Therefore, both parties are missing each other, and it is a sign of wisdom that they gratify themselves and do not delay this unnecessarily. Also, there is a connotation of gentleness as well; Jabir should realize that he is a young man, and therefore he should not act in a manner that might be painful to his wife.

The hadith of Jabir has many other benefits in other areas of fiqh. However, for our purposes, this is the last part regarding this beautiful hadith and how we can benefit from it in the context of Islamic sexuality.





GOAL OF THE SHARIAH

MARITAL BLISS IS A GOAL OF THE SHARIAH

Besides the hadith of Jabir which we discussed, there are many other traditions that state the importance of finding conjugal happiness within the folds of marriage. The Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam himself said, "From this world, women and perfume have been made beloved to me, but the coolness of my eyes comes from prayer" [al-Bukhari]. In one hadith we learn, "This whole world is an enjoyment, and its best enjoyment is a righteous wife" [Muslim]. Another hadith states "I advise you to marry young women, for they have sweeter lips...and are more passionate in their embrace" [Reported by Ibn Majah, al-Tabarani, and others, and it is hasan].

And finally, we are advised in the traditions, "If one of you approaches his wife, and then wishes to repeat, let him do wudhu, for it will make the recurrence more energetic" [Abu Dawud].

Benefits:

- In all of these hadiths, we see once again the clear encouragement to engage in passionate and fulfilling intimate relations with one's spouse.
- Even the blessed Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam found comfort in his wives, but the comfort that prayer and turning to Allah gave him was obviously the most sweet and pure.
- In another hadith, the Companion is told that a woman of his age would be better because her passion would be more. Better kissing is explicitly mentioned, and more passionate sex is hinted at.
- A righteous wife (and, by analogy, a good husband) is the best enjoyment of this world. Pure, halal, encouraged enjoyment.
- The frank advice given in the last tradition makes it crystal clear that we should aim to have passionate sex lives. No less a figure than our beloved Prophet informed us of ways to increase that passion. Washing oneself after a first act invigorates the body and rejuvenates the soul, and thus helps in repeating the act again.
- In this last tradition, one method of increasing passion is mentioned. This shows that other methods may also be studied and taught.
- Notice that while the message is crystal clear in each and every one of these traditions, never is the wording vulgar, nor is the language crude. Similarly, we should be frank in our teachings, but there is no need to employ unbecoming language.





INTIMACY IN THE QUR'AAN

The Qur'aan frequently references sexual activity. In dozens of verses, Allah mentions the process of creation. In one verse, the Qur'aan says: "Let man see what he has been created from. He has been created from a liquid that is spurt out (i.e., ejaculated), which proceeded from between the backbones and the ribs" [Surah al-Tariq; 5-7]. Many commentators stated that the reference to '...between the backbones and ribs' is to a common sexual position, and the backbone is that of the man and the ribs that of the women.

And Allah says, "Your women are your field, so come to them as and when you please" [Surah al-Baqara; 223]

Ata (d. 103 AH), the famous Successor, said that whenever he would recite the Qur'aan to Ibn Abbas, Ibn Abbas would never interrupt him, but rather listen intently (to ensure correct recitation). However, when he recited this verse, Ibn Abbas stopped him and said, "Do you know why this verse was revealed? Some Jews of Madinah used to believe that if a man approached a woman from her back (one version adds: while she was kneeling), the child would be born deformed. So Allah revealed this verse, allowing men to approach their wives in any position." Similarly, in the famous hadith regarding the prohibition of anal intercourse, the Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam said, "Allah is not embarrassed at the truth: approach her (i.e., your wife) from her front or from her back, but avoid the anus" [Abu Dawud].

Benefit:

The Qur'aan and Sunnah, being the divine code of guidance that they are, mention the issue of various sexual positions, but do so without going into unnecessary details and unbefitting descriptions. Enough is said to get the point across, and other details are left to the couple's experience and imagination. Similarly, the standard books of tafseer, hadith explanations, and fiqh works do not take on the role of sex manuals, but rather mention enough to explain what is and what is not permissible.

In the verse that Ibn Abbas explained, Allah revealed it in response to an awkward situation regarding the permissibility of a particular position. One of the spouses refused to engage in intimacy in this position, believing that it was impermissible, and that it would be harmful if it resulted in pregnancy. At this, Allah revealed a beautiful simile: the conjugal act is similar to a farmer planting seeds in a field. The farmer has many options in how he plants those seeds, and is not restricted to any one manner. Similarly, the Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam clarified that as long as intimacy occurred in the right place, the Shariah did not dictate or restrict how intimacy occurred.





AL-GHAZALI ON THE PLEASURES OF THE AFTERLIFE

Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505) mentions in his famous work *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* that scholars have mentioned many blessings of intimacy, such as protecting one's chastity and increasing one's progeny. But he also mentions a blessing that might surprise many Muslims. One of the blessings of intimacy that our scholars have mentioned, al-Ghazali says, is to experience some of the pleasures of the afterlife. He continues:

"And I swear, what they have said is absolutely true! For indeed, in this pleasure [of sex] – a pleasure that cannot be compared to any other pleasure – if only it were to persist, it would indeed be a sign or signal for those pleasures of the next life that have been promised to us. To entice someone regarding a pleasure that he has never experienced is of no use! If an impotent man were to be enticed with sex, or a young child with power, there would be no temptation. Therefore, one of the blessings of the sexual experience and pleasure in this world is the hope of its perpetual existence in the next, so that this can be used as a motivation for the worship of Allah. Marvel, therefore, at the wisdom of Allah, and His Mercy, for look at how He has placed in one desire two lives: an external life, and an internal life. So the external life is the preservation of a man through his progeny and children. And the internal life is the life of the next world. For the pleasure of sex is diminished in this world because it must remain temporary, and is swiftly terminated, but by experiencing it, one's desire to have such a pleasure remain everlasting becomes firm, and this encourages one to persist in deeds of worship that would allow him to experience such pleasures."

An amazing quote from an amazing scholar! In the next section, I have yet another interesting example.

A Teacher Teaches His Students...

It is very difficult to improve one's conjugal experiences without reading up or otherwise learning about better techniques. Yet, at the same time, not only is this highly uncomfortable for many Muslims (for we are encouraged to be shy and modest), there is the added problem that most if not all such material present in our times would contain pornographic images and graphic text, and thus be out of our (halal) reach.

When we turn to our own classical works, we find that sexual conduct has been mentioned in numerous books. Every single work of fiqh has chapters related to sex. Every explanation of hadith, every tafsir of the Qur'aan, must by its very nature deal with matters pertaining to sexuality. Additionally, throughout our own fourteen centuries of tradition and history, there have been many books written to help couples find more meaningful relationships and increase sexual pleasure within marriage. These works are many times quite explicit, but hardly ever crude or vulgar. And I believe that we can learn much from their language and style.



One of the more interesting examples of this is one that the famous Imam al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH) mentions in his Tafsir. In reference to the verse of women being one's '...cultivation', [al-Baqara; 223] he mentions that the Maliki jurist Ibn al-Arabi (d. 543) narrates that his own teacher, who was the most respected and esteemed scholar of Andalus of his era, went into some detail describing the female organ to his students, so that they would be better aware of what to do and not to do. Says the teacher to his presumably unmarried male student body, "And the closest image that I can give to you of the female organ is [the number] thirty-five..." so saying, he holds his finger and thumb together, and sticks out the other three fingers above it. "Now" he continues, "...the zero (meaning the place between the finger and thumb) is the actual vagina, and this is where the male organ goes. My finger above it is where the urethra is – this is where the female urinates from, and this is a different place than the actual vagina..."

One can only imagine how eagerly these young men must have been paying attention to their teacher's fingers and 'schematic diagram' that he attempted to demonstrate!

What is of interest to us here is the fact that great scholars like al-Qurtubi and Ibn al-Arabi saw no problem in relaying these experiences in their standard and famous works (on Tafsir no less!). The lesson that we learn from this is that basic human anatomy is a necessary requirement for understanding such issues, and as long as permissible means are used to convey the information, there is nothing wrong with studying such information!

A BLESSING OF PARADISE

The topic of the houris in Paradise always brings a smile to the faces of most men, and makes many women feel uncomfortable. This is of course completely understandable.

But have you ever wondered why these heavenly creatures are described with such exquisite detail? Their clothing, their eyes, their skin, their bodies, their poetry, their love – all is mentioned in the Qur'aan and Sunnah in language that leaves little to the imagination. Many a man feels sexually excited thinking about the rewards that await those who are destined to receive them. How many have used those very feelings to entice them to wake up for tahajjud, or to control impious urges of this world?

This fact alone clearly demonstrates that sexual arousal simply cannot, by itself, be anything wrong or sinful. It is quite clear that the purpose of these descriptions is to entice men to do better in order to earn such rewards. It is as if Allah wants us to be motivated by that arousal – to channel that energy into something useful and productive. As we have mentioned more than once before, this is in stark contrast to medieval notions of Christianity, where arousal itself was deemed irreligious.

Extrapolating from this, our sexual desires of this life should also be embraced, but channeled appropriately. If some of our desires are meant to be delayed and experienced





in the afterlife, others are meant to be accepted and experienced in this world. This is what Allah intended for us!

And by the way, the strongest position regarding women in Paradise is that they too will have a mate: each woman (even those who died single) will have a husband to take care of her and satisfy her. There are no singles in Paradise; Allah only mentions the female companions of men because men are more overtly sexual creatures. Most women will have their partners of this life in Paradise (and these partners will be the best for them in every aspect), but for those who don't, they too shall be blessed with partners in the next.

So, brothers and sisters, dream away!

I want to understand YOU!

CHANGING COURSE

In the earlier sections, we sought to prove that the Qur'aan and Sunnah approach the subject of sexuality in a frank and clear manner, and with this we wanted to 'break the ice' for the upcoming sections. Hereon, we will be concentrating more on the practical side of intimacy: mentioning the physiological and emotional differences between men and women, the ways to increase romance, and some basic tips on experiencing better intimacy.

However, before we begin, some might question whether we as Muslims are allowed to benefit from Western sources regarding these topics. The response is that our religion encourages us to take wisdom from all peoples and cultures. The Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam said, "Wisdom is the lost item of the believer – wherever he finds it, he takes it." Just as we take from all societies their knowledge of medicine, engineering, and chemistry, so too there is no problem in taking good and beneficial knowledge regarding intimacy from different cultures as well. In fact, even our Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam did so. He said, "I was about to forbid you from having intercourse with your wives while they are breastfeeding children, but I saw that the Romans and Persians did that and it did not harm their children" [Reported by al-Bukhari]. Therefore, the fact that the Romans and Persians engaged in intimacy while the mother was breastfeeding, and it did not harm the child, was used by our Prophet to allow intercourse during this time.





VISUAL VERSUS EMOTIONAL

We mentioned earlier that Allah has created men and women differently. One of the most pronounced differences between genders when it comes to issues of intimacy is arousal. Each gender has been keyed to respond to different senses. If a couple wishes to maximize feelings of closeness and intimacy, it is essential that each party understands the other's arousal mechanism.

For men, the primary sense of arousal is physical. Seeing the figure, smelling the aroma, and touching the body of a woman is what arouses a man. When a man's physical needs are satisfied, he is most likely to reciprocate with emotional responses.

For a woman, on the other hand, the primary sense of arousal is emotional. Feeling loved, appreciated and cared for are the underlying emotional factors that will mostly make the woman love back in return. When a woman's emotional needs are satisfied, she is more likely to reciprocate with physical responses.

One of the biggest sources of conflict in a marriage is this simple lack of understanding. Women feel used when their husbands take advantage of them physically but ignore their emotional needs. On the other hand, men feel frustrated that their wives are so withdrawn and cold during acts of intimacy, complaining both at the quantity and quality of these acts. Both parties need to give more of what the other party wants, in order to receive back what they themselves desire.

A marriage is a give-and-take relationship. It is a two way street. You must give the best of what your partner wants in order to obtain the best of what you wish to receive. Men need to learn to be more sensitive and understanding, and women need to learn to be more physical.

WHAT WOMEN ARE LOOKING FOR

To have a successful relationship, a couple must understand each other's needs. A husband must take into account that a woman's needs and expectations are different than a man's. Great intimacy can only be achieved if a woman finds a complete, fulfilling relationship.





SO WHAT ARE WOMEN LOOKING FOR IN A MARRIAGE?

Women get married to find a special best friend. They want someone who will share their secrets, laugh and joke with them, love them, cherish them, adore them, be romantic with them, and make them feel beautiful and sexy. They want someone who will be attracted to them emotionally through their personality, and attracted to them physically through their bodies.

A woman wants a partner who will strive together with her through this life; laughing and rejoicing through the good times, and sticking by each other and supporting each other through the bad times. She wants a man strong in his deen who can stand up and take the responsibility of the household, and help raise the children in accordance with Islam.

A woman wants her husband to be her friend, companion, and soul mate.

Any good husband must realize that a woman's primary need is emotional. He must take into account the prophetic tradition "The best of you are those who are best to their wives," [Sahih al-Bukhari], and then strive to be the best to his wife.

Men have been assigned the responsibility by Allah to take care of their wives, and this entails treating them with love and respect, and striving to make them happy. If a husband can fulfill his wife's primary needs, not only will Allah reward him, his wife will be content with him, and together the couple's life will be more harmonious. Moreover, when a woman's needs are fulfilled she will be more willing to fulfill her husband's needs.

The best way to satisfy a woman's emotional needs is to listen to her and respond to her with compassion. By listening to her intently, with your undivided attention, and taking a genuine interest in what she has to say, she will feel loved, cherished and important. Realize that when she approaches you with her problems, she doesn't necessarily want solutions, she just wants sympathy and understanding.

Being Romantic

As we explained previously, a woman's primary need for her husband is emotional. She wants to share an emotional connection based on love, commitment and acceptance. A good husband must love his wife both as a person (meaning her personality) and as a woman (meaning her physical body).

One of the ways a man can fulfill this emotional need is through romance. During the 'honeymoon period,' romance is easy for most men. This is because everything about the relationship is new and exciting; the man is continuously day-dreaming about his wife and is eager to communicate that to her. It is easier for men to be more attentive and show extra tenderness during this phase.





But true romance is when a man continues this even after the 'honeymoon' phase. It is when the husband makes an effort to keep the marriage alive, thinks about ways to please his wife, and genuinely strives to make her feel loved and appreciated.

Unfortunately, after the honeymoon phase, romance loses its appeal for most men, and in fact becomes awkward and even unnatural! But Alhamdulillah, it is not difficult, and with the correct intention and mindset, romance can easily be re-learned.

There are many ways a man can show romance. Let us get started by mentioning two types of romance:

1. SPONTANEOUS ROMANCE:

These are little acts that the husband does to show affection without being prompted. The key concept here is to be spontaneous. The element of surprise is crucial! It is not what you do that is as important as simply doing something personal. This could include sending her a message saying "I love you" via text, email, or a little sticky note placed in a convenient place. Other examples include buying her an unexpected gift, or giving her a tight hug or a passionate kiss when she least expects it. These acts keep the marriage alive, as it injects excitement and heat into the relationship. This spontaneity helps melt away any resentment that inevitably builds up.

2. RESPONSIVE ROMANCE:

These are acts that the husband does in response to a situation at hand. They are done when a husband finds his wife emotionally or physically down. For example, ordering food from outside if her day was hectic; giving her a massage if her back is sore; or simply sitting down with her and listening to her if she is upset about an incident that happened. These acts show genuine care, and strengthen and deepen the marital bond.

The fact of the matter is that many men are scared by the word 'romance'; they feel that it is beyond them. Yet true romance is nothing more or less than appreciating a woman for who she is, looking after her, and caring for her.

Remember the beautiful hadith in which our beloved Prophet salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam compared women to '...fragile vessels,' and reminded us to be gentle with them (Reported by al-Bukhari). Emotionally, women are different than men, and protecting these fragile vessels in every way possible is the best (and most natural) job men can do.





ROMANCE TIPS FOR MEN

Men typically find romantic gestures a bit awkward – many assume that anything they do will be considered clichéd and insincere. They think too deeply about the intellectual ramifications of showing such a gesture, and forget that it really is the thought that counts!

One way to keep romance alive is to say comforting and encouraging words to your wife – words that express your love and your attraction to her. Saying 'I love you' while you mean it always does wonders to a relationship. Additionally, a wife always loves to hear her husband praise her looks, especially when she dresses up and gets ready. Men also need to understand that cracking jokes about 'second wives' is simply not funny; it hurts a wife's feelings by making her feel inadequate, and trivializes the special love that a couple should have (please note that the issue is not the concept of polygyny, but the flippant attitude that many Muslim men have towards it).

Another easy method to show romance is non-sexual touching. By 'non-sexual', we mean a touch that does not directly lead to sex. A woman's skin is ten times more sensitive to touch and pressure than a man's and has a higher amount of oxytocin (also known as the "cuddle" hormone), which is the hormone that stimulates the urge to be touched. This is why the majority of women loved to be cuddled, touched and caressed.

Some of the ways that touch can be incorporated in daily life are simple hugs, holding hands as you are walking or talking, stroking her hair as you listen to her, or touching and caressing any part of her body whilst relaxing or lying down. By touching her body, you reassure her that you still find her attractive and beautiful.

Avoid groping (i.e., 'sexual touching') at awkward moments – such actions typically turn a woman off. Women generally like to be dealt with in a gentle and caring manner. This is especially true with women who have children. A mother normally spends the whole day with the children tugging and pulling on her, so she doesn't need the same type of touching from her husband! Rather, she needs a more nurturing, caring touch.

Men underestimate the importance and the impact of non-sexual touching, as they themselves don't have this desire. A man's skin is thicker, and he produces lower amounts of oxytocin (the "cuddle" hormone) so when the woman plays with a man's hair or holds his hand it doesn't have the same effect on him. However for a woman, the touch is the simplest, most powerful way to make her feel loved and beautiful.





LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Love has many languages. By this, we mean that there are different ways that people express love and recognize it. Many times, the way that a person expresses love is not the same way that their partner wants to hear it.

Imagine, if you will, two people who are speaking different languages to one another – say, Chinese and Swahili. Even though one of them might be saying 'I love you' in her language, the other person simply has no clue that this is a message of love. They are not communicating in the same wavelength.

Many times, a person feels unloved by his or her spouse because the expected language to hear that love never materializes. Yet, if the spouse were asked about his or her feelings, it would become clear that true love does actually exist. It's just a matter of not communicating the feeling of love properly to the other party.

For example, some people express their love by wanting to spend quality time with their beloved. This is generally more common amongst women. If a wife does not get to spend quality time with her husband, she might feel unloved, even if he is showing his love to her in other ways (by spending his money on her, for example). On the other hand, other people express love by physical acts, such as kissing and sexual activity. This is more common amongst men. When a man regularly approaches his wife, he is showing that he loves her. Yet, the wife is not 'hearing' this love because in her vocabulary, love must be expressed in a different language – that of time. Unless and until she sees this aspect, she will find it difficult to understand that her husband loves her.

Another language of love is helping the one whom you love. A wife might show her love for her husband by taking care of his daily needs and household chores. But it is possible that the husband does not hear this love, because he is not tuned into this language! Rather, he might be expecting it in different ways. Therefore, all of the acts of devotion and dedication that the wife shows to her husband are simply 'tuned out', like a foreign language, because that is not what he wants to hear to confirm his wife's love for him.

By understanding the different ways that people show love, each spouse can better appreciate the languages of love that his or her spouse speaks. Many people unknowingly speak more than one language of love – however, until the other partner learns to listen to and recognize that language, all of these beautiful expressions of love will be lost and evaporate into thin air.





STRESS AND MY RELATIONSHIP



DEALING WITH STRESS

In the earlier sections of this book, we mentioned some of the differences between men and women. One major difference is the way that men and women handle stress. This is especially manifested when an argument occurs.

Frivolous arguments are inevitable in any marriage – whether it's to do with who does what chores, or not living up to an expectation, or making a comment that was deemed inconsiderate. When two people are living together, friction is simply unavoidable. However, the way one spouse deals with stress can sometimes compound the problem, and propel a trivial dispute into a serious argument. Having an understanding of the way men and women deal with stress helps to alleviate some of the pain.

Men generally deal with stress by thinking through the problem – by withdrawing into an imaginary bubble (some have called it a 'cave') and having some silent time to reason through the issues. Women on the other hand, want to talk through the problem with someone and reach a solution via communication.

If a petty argument occurs, typically the woman wishes to communicate her feelings in an expressive manner, which irritates the man and causes him to leave the room. This is a recipe for disaster. Whatever issue the couple was arguing about becomes secondary. What goes through the woman's mind is "I can't believe he left me in this state! I'm trying to solve the problem with him and he just walks away!" The man, on the other hand, thinks to himself: "I can't believe she got so emotional. I need to leave this stressful area, calm down, and think things through!"

During a heated argument, the last thing a man wants to do is talk about the issue. And the last thing a woman wants to do is not talk about the issue. So what is the solution, as both want opposite things?

Men need to understand that when they walk away to be alone, the woman feels that he is acting heartless and therefore doesn't love her anymore. To her, communication equates to love. The time that he is silent and alone is the most painful time for a woman.

Women need to understand that if a man stops talking and leaves, it just means he needs time to himself to think things through. It does not mean he doesn't love her or doesn't care; in fact, if he didn't care he would not be stressed and would not need to think things through! For a man, staying and talking about things will make it worse and cause him more stress.





Such scenarios can be dealt with by each spouse communicating his or her needs. The husband tells his wife that he wants some time to think things through, that insha Allah the two of them will work things out, but he can't concentrate on a solution when she is so emotional. The wife, in turn, understands that his wanting to 'withdraw' is his way of trying to solve the problem, and asks for a time when the two will later talk over the issue. This way, the man gets his space, and the woman knows that she will get to a conclusion.

Of course, throughout all difficult situations, Muslim couples should always turn to Allah and ask Allah to make their affairs easy for them. Remember that dua solves all problems if done properly! And remember what Allah has promised in the Qur'aan to couples who have a serious argument, and yet they are sincere in trying to reconcile and take all the proper steps: "...if the both of them truly desire reconciliation, Allah will bring about a reconciliation between them" [Nisaa; 35].





THE MAGIC OFTEN NEGLECTED



FOREPLAY

The most common complaint amongst men is that their wives are not as interested in sexual intimacy as the men are. And likewise, the most common complaint amongst women is that their husbands are just interested in sex and only come close to them for one purpose.

One of the primary reasons for this disparity is the issue of sexual arousal.

A man's arousal is like a microwave: it can be turned on instantly. A woman's arousal, on the other hand, is like an oven: it slowly and gradually heats up over time. This is why when a husband approaches his wife, he is already turned on and aroused. He seeks instant gratification. He mistakenly assumes that his wife will get aroused as instantaneously as he does, and gets frustrated when she doesn't respond to him the way that he wants.

Conversely, a woman feels frustrated that her husband wishes her to 'perform' on demand, without her emotional or physical needs being addressed first.

Men must be more sensitive to a woman's needs, and understand that for a woman to start her arousal oven, she needs to feel loved, cherished, and beautiful. She needs to feel emotionally satisfied, otherwise she will feel like the man is just taking advantage of the fact that she is his wife and must obey. The most intimate act of marriage, that of sex, will become a chore for her that she dreads instead of enjoys. It is a husband's responsibility to make sure that he has addressed the emotional needs of his wife before he approaches her. The best way a man can do this is through romance, non-sexual touching and helping her deal with the stresses of daily life.

Men need sex to feel loved and appreciated. When a man approaches his wife, he is showing that he loves her. This is why when a wife does the act unwillingly, with little excitement, and treats it like a chore, the man feels rejected.

In turn, women need to understand that romance is something that does not come naturally to men, as men don't need romance to be aroused or feel loved. Women need to be patient and continually try to explain this to their partners.

In conclusion, both men and women need to understand the differences in the mechanisms of arousal, and be sensitive towards each other's needs. A man needs to try and be more attentive beforehand as this is vital for a woman's enjoyment. The woman needs to understand that a man's arousal is instant and for him intimacy equals love, so intimacy needs to be a priority on her list.





THE KEY TO AN OUTSTANDING RELATIONSHIP

CONFIDENCE, COMMUNICATION, CREATIVITY

The act of intimacy is the single most private and personal moment that a husband and wife share together. A good sexual life helps couples come closer together in love, and allows each spouse to overlook the more trivial problems in a marriage. Conversely, when bedroom intimacy suffers, other problems in a marriage are compounded and more tensions develop.

Couples should be aware of the 'Three Basic C's' that lead to healthy and happy intimacy. These C's are:

1) Confidence. In order to enjoy healthy intimacy, both partners need to be confident in themselves, and not distracted by insecurities. Most times, such insecurities are self-induced (for example, a woman might be too conscious of her body and feel that her husband will not find her attractive). Sometimes, however, they might be induced by a comment made by a spouse (for example, a husband might be worried about not being able to give his partner what she wants). Each partner must work to resolve any personal issues so that one's full attention can be given to the act itself. Until such issues are resolved, the spouse will simply be too self-conscious and insecure to achieve ultimate happiness in intimacy.

2) Communication. It is inevitable that issues will arise regarding the act of intimacy. Perhaps the husband is not gentle in some aspect; perhaps the wife wishes a longer foreplay. Whatever the issue is, the other spouse will not be able to read the mind of the first spouse! Rather, there must be frank communication if it is desired that the act of intimacy reach its full potential. Such communication must be based on positive reinforcement rather than negative criticism. It is very easy to bruise a spouse's ego and hurt his or her feelings if one is critical. One should phrase all such suggestions in a positive manner. Instead of saying, "It's really frustrating when you spend so little time kissing me," one can say, "I would really enjoy it more if you spent more time being romantic beforehand." Such positive reinforcement will far more likely bring out the best in one's spouse.

3) Creativity. No matter how passionate a couple is, after years of marriage, it is likely that even this intimate act becomes routine. The couple eventually evolve into well-defined habits, and know exactly what to do and when to do it. Such a 'routine' has the negative aspect of making intimacy monotonous. And when intimacy becomes monotonous, it ceases to serve the function that it should. This is where creativity comes into play. Couples should learn to change routines, vary positions, or alter environments. This is one of the main reasons why taking a vacation with your spouse is a key factor in spicing up the relationship.





Most books written on the topic of sexuality in the West concentrate on the different types of positions that a couple can engage in. While this aspect is important, there is far more to healthy intimacy than the physical position, as we have previously shown. Additionally, going into explicit details regarding this topic is not appropriate in front of a general audience. However, this does not mean that we should remain silent on the issue: some basic fiqh guidelines need to be clearly delineated (and there are many such issues that arise amongst Muslims living in Western lands), and couples should learn, in a halal manner, facts that will help spice up their marriage. Because of the delicate nature of this particular subtopic, we will set aside this discussion for those who are more interested in it in future seminars.

FINAL THOUGHTS

CONCLUSION AND FINAL ADVICE

I sincerely hope that you benefited from this e-book and pray that you are able to implement some of what you learned in order to find happiness within your marriages.

One last advice: remember that sexual intimacy is one of the best ways to overcome everyday marital disputes. It acts as a soothing factor that eases the tension and conflict that inevitably builds up between partners. It strengthens feelings of love and cements bonds of affection.

Therefore, sex should be used to mend bridges and make up after arguments. Even if there is an enormous amount of emotional baggage, and the couple has still not resolved an argument, if one spouse approaches the other tenderly, wanting some affection and romance, it is in the best interest of the marriage that the other partner swallows his/her pride and accept this invitation for intimacy. What this invitation shows is the underlying love; it indicates wanting to be accepted again by the other spouse.

For sure, the act of intimacy will not necessarily solve the issue at hand. It might possibly do so, if the argument was over something extremely petty (as most marital arguments are). However, if a specific, repeated issue or existent attitude sparked the argument, simply being intimate will not get rid of the problem. The actual problem can only be resolved by mutual discussion. What intimacy will do, however, is break the tension, and allow feelings of anger to subside to a great degree – enough to jumpstart a positive, healthy discussion.

Remember that even as a husband and wife have an argument, deep down inside the two of them do love each other. They have a special bond that no one else can possibly share with them, and have been intimate in a way that only a couple can. Therefore, when a husband or wife reaches out to be intimate after a bad argument, he or she is showing how much they care about that special bond, and that they don't want anything to get in between the two of them. In the marriage relationship, nothing is more powerful than healthy intimacy to resurrect feelings of love and compassion.





In the very same verse that Allah describes our spouses '**...like a garment**' unto us (Sura al-Baqara; 287), Allah commands us in the next phrase: '...so therefore, now embrace them (i.e., your spouses), and seek what Allah has written for you'. Most commentators of the Qur'aan have interpreted the phrase '...seek what Allah has written for you' as being a reference to sexual pleasures and to the blessing of children that follows. Therefore, Allah wants us to obtain these pleasures, and reminds us to thank Him for it.

Let us conclude as we began: with the famous hadith of Jabir b. Abdillah. Remember that our beloved Prophet *salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam* actually wanted Jabir to find pleasure with his wife, and he also wanted her to find pleasure with him ('...so that you can play with her, and she can play with you'). Embrace this beautiful aspect of our religion, appreciate the harmony of our faith with our human nature, and rejoice in Allah's blessings upon you.

Goodbyes are always difficult. Let's hope that we meet again soon!

Jazakum Allah khayr! Please remember me in your du`as, and I will remember you in mine!

Your brother,

YASIR QADHI

